(d) A Court of Inquiry has been completed on the MIG-21 accident at Uttarlai. The accident was caused due to Technical Defect in which the engine flamed out in the air.

(e) Several measures are being taken by the Government to reduce these accidents on a continuous basis in order to bring down the accident rates under all categories by formulation of Accident Prevention Programme, Environment Cleanliness, Bird Hazard control, conduct of Studies on Human Error and Technical Defects and interaction with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited/ Original Equipment Manufacturers.

Development of Naval Variant of LCA with the US Cooperation

4396. SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government of India has sought cooperation from the US in the development of Naval Variant of LCA;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether India sought cooperation in any other field; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) and (d) Yes, Sir. There was a contract with US firm on the development of a few sub-systems of LCA.

Retirement of Air Marshals in IAF

4397. SHRI KARTAR SINGH DUGGAL: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that IAF has retired four of its air marshals during last one year;

(b) if so, whether it is also a fact that all of them belonged to a minority community; and

(c) if so, whether it is a mere coincidence or is there more in it as feared in the minority community' circle?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) to (c) Government have decided to compulsorily retire Air Marshal Manjit Singh Sekhon with effect from 21.6.2002. All other Air Marshals who retired during the last one year either superannuated or proceeded on pre-mature retirement.

Elections to Cantonment Boards

4398. SHRI C.P. THIRUNAVUKKARASU: Will the Minister of DEFENCE to pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the High Level Committee has reviewed scenario of all cantonments across the country as reported in the Indian Express dated the 23rd February, 2002;

(b) if so, the findings of the Committee;

(c) whether Government have postponed election in all Cantonment Boards;

(d) if so, the reasons therefore; and

(e) by when, the election will be held?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FRRNANDES): (a) and (b) The committee constituted to examine the merger of Indian Defence Estate Service with the Military Engineering Service has not finalized its'findings.

(c) to (e) Yes, Sir. No time frame has been fixed for holding of elections to Cantonment Boards.